

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

INFO OCT-01 AF-10 IO-14 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03

INR-11 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03

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FM AMEMBASSY BUJUMBURA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4462
INFO AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
AMEMBASSY DAR ES SALAAM
AMCONSUL BUKAVU
AMEMBASSY KIGALI
AMEMBASSY KINSHASA
AMEMBASSY ROME
USMISSION USUN NEW YORK JTRE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BUJUMBURA 0575

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, BY

SUBJECT: FOOD SHORTAGES AND DOMESTIC POLITICS

REF: A. KIGALI 500; B. BUJUMBURA 557; C. BUJUMBURA 0574

SUMMARY: BURUNDI FOOD SHORTAGES MAY BE MUCH WORSE THAN RECENTLY
REPORTED. END SUMMARY

1. IN A GROUP CONVERSATION AT A SEPT. 18 RECEPTION WITH SOVIET AND
ZAIRE AMBS, THE ACTING UNDP RESREP, AND THE VATICAN CHARGE, I ALLUDED
TO THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE FOOD SHORTAGES IN RWANDA (REF A), OF WHICH
MOST OTHERS SEEMED GENERALLY UNAWARE. THE VATICAN CHARGE, HOWEVER,
WAS WELL INFORMED AND THEN ADDED THAT THE SITUATION IN BURUNDI WAS
EQUALLY BAD. HE CITED THE PRECIPITOUS RISE OVER LAST COUPLE MONTHS
IN KILO PRICE OF MASS FOOD STAPLE SUCH AS BEANS FROM 10 BURUNDI
FRANCS TO 30 OR MORE, AND ADDED THAT REPORTS FROM OTHER PARTS OF
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COUNTRY WERE JUST AS ALARMING. HE SAID THAT THIS SITUATION WAS

SURELY THE REASON FOR AT LEAST MONTH'S DELAY IN REOPENING SCHOOLS. ZAIRE AMB DID NOT KNOW ABOUT RWANDA, BUT CLAIMED THAT PRIVATE BURUNDI STUDIES POINTED TO SHORTAGE OF 350,000 TONS FOOD OVER NEXT 12 MONTHS. VATICAN CHARGE THOUGHT THIS MIGHT BE A BIT HIGH, BUT THAT 200,000 WAS MINIMUM SHORTFALL.

2. I REFERRED TO GRB REQUEST TO UNDP FOR ONLY 27,000 TONS OF FOOD AID (REF B) AND TO FACT THAT FAO REP HERE BELIEVES "DEFICIT" WILL BE NO MORE THAN 15,000 TONS. I NOTED THAT INFORMATION FROM KIGALI (REF A) PLACES HARDEST HIT AREAS IN NORTH OF RWANDA. SINCE THIS IS FURTHEST FROM BURUNDI, MIGHT IT NOT BE THAT BURUNDI ITSELF IS MUCH LESS AFFECTED THAN RWANDA? OTHERS THOUGHT THAT THIS WAS UNLIKELY SINCE GENERALLY SIMILAR METEOROLOGICAL CONDITIONS PREVAIL. (PAST FAMINES HAVE USUALLY STRUCK BOTH COUNTRIES SIMULTANEOUSLY.) VATICAN CHARGE MENTIONED THAT NOT ONLY BEANS WERE INVOLVED, BUT THAT CURRENT PREMATURE END TO DRY SEASON WAS AFFECTING HARVEST OF VALLEY CROPS SUCH AS CORN AND SORGHUM IN INTERIOR.

3. I URGED ACTING UNDP CHIEF TO TALK PROBLEM OVER WITH FAO REP, AS WELL AS WITH BURUNDI AUTHORITIES IN EFFORT TO CLARIFY PICTURE, TO WHICH HE READILY AGREED. HE AND OTHERS SUGGESTED THAT GRB WAS TRYING IN ALL WAYS TO SUPPRESS BAD NEWS, AND THAT REQUEST FOR 27,000 TONS WAS MEANT MERELY TO TIDE COUNTRY OVER NEXT TWO OR THREE MONTHS.

4. COMMENT: THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT REGIME IS VERY SKITTISH ABOUT REVEALING ITS FAILINGS, ESPECIALLY WHEN ALL OF ITS PROPAGANDA WORKS SO ASSIDUOUSLY TO PAINT A GLOWING PICTURE OF PROGRESS. YET IT IS HARD TO IMAGINE THAT, IF IT REALLY ANTICIPATED SHORTAGES APPROACHING THE RWANDAN LEVEL, THE GRB WOULD MAKE A TERRIBLE PREDICAMENT EVEN WORSE BY DELIBERATELY REFUSING TO MAKE AN INTERNATIONAL APPEAL FOR ADEQUATE AID TO COPE WITH A PROBLEM WHICH CANNOT BE HIDDEN FOR LONG, AND WHICH IN ANY CASE CAN BE BLAMED ON UNCONTROLLABLE NATURAL FORCES. MOREOVER, INITIAL GRB APPEAL TO FAO IN JULY WAS FOR 320,000 TONS OF FOODSTUFFS, AND THIS FIGURE WAS ONLY REDUCED WHEN WFP REP PERSUADED THE MINISTER RN AGRICULTURE THAT HIS CALCULATIONS HAD BEEN UNREALISTIC.

5. ON THE OTHER HAND, THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT THE GOVERNMENT IS BATTENING DOWN THE HATCHES. THE MEASURES REPORTED IN PARAS 2 AND 3 REF C (NOTAL) ARE OBVIOUS MOVES TO KEEP GOODS AND PEOPLE (INCLUDING

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DIPLOMATS) UNDER CONTROL. THE SMUGGLING OF BEANS FROM FOOD SHORT RWANDA TO BURUNDI BECAUSE PRICES ARE HIGHER IN BURUNDI (KIGALI 500 NOTAL) MAY INDEED IMPLY THAT TRUE SCARCITY IS WORSE HERE. MOREOVER, THE ZAIRE AMB SAID THAT HIS GOVERNMENT HAS RECENTLY HALTED FOOD EXPORTS TO BURUNDI BECAUSE TRAFFIC HAD SO INCREASED AS TO DEplete RESERVES IN KIVU PROVINCE.

6. UNTIL HARDER DATA BECOME AVAILABLE, IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO REACH

ANY FIRM CONCLUSION. HOWEVER, AS A FLIGHT INTO SHEEREST SPECULATION ONE COULD POSTULATE THAT A DEBATE OVER HOW TO HANDLE FOOD SHORTAGE MAY ALSO BE ONE OF FACTORS INVOLVED IN CURRENT DOMESTIC POLITICAL FEUDING HERE. THE HASTY AND SHODDY MOVE TO "RE-ELECT" MICOMBERO (BUJUMBURA 570 NOTAL) COULD ALSO BE PART OF THE EFFORT TO MAXIMIZE REGIME AUTHORITY FOR THE TRIALS AHEAD.
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